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HOW ONE LANDSCAPE-PAINTER PAINTS.

TO one who knows Mr. Sandford R. Gifford well, his success as an artist seems natural enough. Like every other success in Art, it has come from insight and from perseverance. In his opinion—and the opinion is correct—an artist is simply a poet. Each works from the same principles, and each aims at the same results. The only difference between them lies in the materials they use. Both the painter and the poet strive to reproduce the impressions which they have received from beautiful things in Nature. If these impressions can be reproduced by words, it is the business of the poet to reproduce them. If they are subtle and elude the grasp of words, it is the business of the painter to reproduce them.

Take, for instance, the impression made upon one by an Indian-summer afternoon, when not only the foliage but the very atmosphere itself, owing to its density, is suffused with colour, so that the natural colour of the leaves is heightened by the coloured light upon and through and around them. Everybody knows the impression made by the glory of the forest on such a day as that. Everybody feels the influence and responds to the charm of such a scene. But who shall so describe the scene that the impression of it shall be reproduced by words? Who shall write such an account of it that it shall be presented in its fulness to those who never saw it? One might as well try to describe all the colours of the sunset. It is the province of the artist to reproduce such a scene, and only he can do it. He has material which he can so use that when we have looked at his work, we feel just as he felt when he saw the scene, and just as we ourselves should have felt had we seen it. Nay, more: by the secrets of his art, he can even emphasise the impression which the natural scene would have made upon us. He can direct our attention to its salient features, can remove from our attention unimportant features, can make new and finer combinations than Nature herself ever made, and can so arrange matters that our imaginations shall be more easily stimulated. In one sense, therefore, he can really improve upon Nature.

Accordingly, when he finds himself particularly impressed by any natural scene, and determined to make a picture, the first question that arises is, "What causes all this beauty?" (for if there is not beauty in it, he does not wish to paint it). Of course, if one is to reproduce the effect which Nature has produced, he must use the means which Nature has used. It is necessary, therefore, to seek, first of all, the sources of the beauty of the scene which is to be painted. The grand distinction between an artist and another person of equal sensibility to natural beauty who is not an artist is, that the former can penetrate into the causes of that beauty, and can make use of those causes, while the latter cannot do either. With Mr. Gifford landscape-painting is air-painting; and his endeavour is to imitate the colour of the air, to use the oppositions of light and dark and colour that he sees before him. If the forms are represented as they are in Nature under atmospheric conditions of light, dark, and colour, these forms will look as they look in Nature, and will produce the same effect.

Thus much, perhaps, Mr. Gifford believes in common with every educated artist. But every artist has his own particular method of work, and, in the case of a successful artist, this particular method is always an interesting thing to know. Mr. Gifford's method is this: When he sees anything which vividly impresses him, and which he therefore wishes to reproduce, he makes a little sketch of it in pencil on a card about as large as an ordinary visiting-card. It takes him, say, half a minute to make this sketch; but there is the idea of the future picture fixed as firmly if not as fully as in the completed work itself. I have seen some of these simple card-sketches, and they do not seem to amount to much. They enable the artist, however, to keep clear in his memory the scenes that have impressed him, even though he should delay further work for months or for years. While travelling, he can in this way lay up a good stock of material for future use. The next step is to make a larger sketch, this time in oil, where what has already been done in black-and-white is repeated in colour. To this sketch, which is about twelve inches by eight, he devotes an hour or two. It serves the purpose of defining to him just what he wants to do, and of fixing it in enduring material. Sometimes the sketch is not successful, and is thrown aside to make room for another. It helps him, also, to decide what he does not want to do. He experiments with it; puts in or leaves out, according as he finds that he can increase or perfect his idea. When satisfactorily finished, it is a model in miniature of what he proposes to do.

He is now ready to paint the picture itself. All that he asks for is a favourable day on which to begin. To Mr. Gifford this first day is the great day. He waits for it; he prepares for it. He wishes to be in the best possible physical condition. He is careful about his food; he is careful to husband his resources. When the day comes, he begins work just after sunrise, and continues work until just before sunset. Ten, eleven, twelve consecutive hours, according to the season of the year, are occupied in the first great effort to put the scene on the canvas. He feels fresh and eager. His studio-door is locked. Nothing is allowed to interrupt him. His luncheon, taken in his studio, consists of a cup of coffee and a piece of bread. His inspiration is at fever-heat; every faculty is stretched to its utmost; his brush moves rapidly, almost carelessly. He does not stop to criticise his work. The "divine afflatus" is within him, and he does unquestioningly whatever it tells him to do, while his pigments are wet and in moveable condition. No day is ever long enough for his first day's work; and very often, at the end of it, the picture looks finished, even to the eye of an artist.

First of all, on this first day, he removes the glaring white of his canvas by staining it with a solution of turpentine and burnt sienna; the reason being that a surface of pure white causes the colours laid upon it to look at first more brilliant than when the canvas is entirely covered with colours. You deceive yourself when you paint upon a white background. Then he takes a white-chalk crayon and makes a drawing of the picture he expects to paint. After that is done, he "sets" his palette, placing little piles of white, cadmium, vermilion, madder-lake, raw sienna, burnt sienna, caledonia brown, and permanent blue, one after another along the upper rim, in the order in which I have enumerated them. These are all the manufactured pigments that he uses; they consist of the fundamental red, yellow, and brown, with their lights and darks. Just below this row of pigments he puts another row, consisting of three or four tints of mixed white and cadmium, three or four tints of orange (obtained by mixing the former tints with red), and three or four tints of green (if foliage is to be painted). Along the lower rim of the palette he puts, one after another, several tints of blue. The palette is then ready. The workshop—the battle-ground, if we please—is in the centre, between these tints of blue and the tints of orange. Here are created all the thousand special tints which the spectator is soon to see in the picture.

The first thing that Mr. Gifford paints, when handling a landscape, is the horizon of the sky; and his reason for doing so is, that in landscape-painting the colour of the sky is the key-note of the picture—that is to say, it governs the impression, determining whether the impression shall be gay or grave, lively or severe; so much so, indeed, that landscape-painting may be called (what we have already said Mr. Gifford calls it) air-painting. Different conditions of the air produce different impressions upon the mind, making us feel sad, or glad, or awed, or what not. Hence the condition—that is, the colour—of the air is the one essential thing to be attended to in landscape-painting. If the painter misses that, he misses everything. Now, the colour of the sky at the horizon is the key-note of the colour of the air. Mr. Gifford, therefore, begins with the horizon.

When the long day is finished, and the picture is produced, the work of criticism, of correction, of completion, is in place. Mr. Gifford does this work slowly. He likes to keep his picture in his

studio as long as possible. He believes in the Horatian maxim of the seven years' fixing of a poem. Sometimes he does not touch the canvas for months after his first criticisms have been executed. Then, suddenly, he sees something that will help it along. I remember hearing him say one day, in his studio: "I thought that picture was done half a dozen times. It certainly might have been called finished six months ago. I was working at it all day yesterday." But one limitation should be noted here. Mr. Gifford does not experiment with his paintings. He does not make a change in one of them unless he knows precisely what he wishes to do. He does not put in a cow, a tree, a figure, and then take it out again. I once heard a landscape-painter laughingly remark: "Do you see that grass in that picture? I have buried twelve cows there!" But the turf was as smiling as ever. When Mr. Gifford is done, he stops. And he knows when he is done. Yet, on the other hand, he would rather take the risk of destroying a picture than to feel the slightest doubt respecting any part of it. The moment of his keenest pleasure is not when his work is satisfactorily completed, but when, long beforehand, he feels that he is going to be successful with it.

Mr. Gifford varnishes the finished picture so many times with boiled oil, or some other semi-transparent or translucent substance, that a veil is made between the canvas and the spectator's eye—a veil which corresponds to the natural veil of the atmosphere. The farther off an object is in Nature, the denser is the veil through which we see it; so that the object itself is of secondary importance. The really important thing is the veil or medium through which we see it. And this veil is different at different times. One day we go out in the morning, and, looking up and down the street, take no note of the sight. We are not impressed. Another day there is a slight change in the density or the clarity of the atmosphere, and lo! what before was a commonplace view has become exquisitely beautiful. It was the change in the air that made the change in the object; and especially when finishing his picture does the artist bear in mind this fact.

Moreover, as the spectator looks through this veil of varnish, the light is reflected and refracted just as it is through the atmosphere—reflections and refractions which, though unseen, are nevertheless felt. The surface of the picture, therefore, ceases to be opaque; it becomes transparent, and we look through it upon and into the scene beyond. In a word, the process of the artist is the process of Nature.

Some years ago Mr. Gifford used to be known as a painter of Indian-summer landscapes; and almost all the commissions he received were commissions to paint such pictures. People had begun to put limitations upon him, he thought; to take for granted that his success was possible only in that particular field. The popular estimate nettled him. He saw other things in Nature as beautiful as an Indian-summer landscape. He resolved to show that he could produce them also. Mr. Gifford believes that, if there is anything an artist is bound to do, it is what he wants to do; and one of the greatest struggles of his life was to escape the limitations that people put upon him. If he desired to limit his capacity as an artist, he would adopt a specialty. But he does not recognise his right wilfully to limit his intelligence.

He therefore proceeded to paint his great picture of 'Kauterskill Clove,' which affords the greatest possible contrast to an Indian-summer landscape. It is a twilight scene, dark-purple toned, lowering, strange, almost awful, altogether striking and effective. The persons who thought they had his measure did not know what to say. The work had taken right hold of them, and they could not get away from it. It was a day of triumph for the painter, and of instruction for his admirers.

Mr. Gifford's industry often leads him to make a dozen sketches of the same scene. The first sketch, indeed, contains the essence, but day after day he visits the place, corrects the first sketch, qualifies it, establishes the relations of one part to another, and fixes the varied gradations of colour. His portfolios are heavy with studies of rocks, of trees, of fallen leaves, of streams, of ocean-waves. Some painters think that, if they reproduce such objects exactly, they lose some of the poetry of natural facts. Mr. Gifford does not think so. He believes in Nature, and is not ashamed laboriously to imitate her. An artist like Corot offends him by slovenliness. To him one of Corot's finished landscapes is scarcely more than a sketch. He gets from it nothing more than he would get from a drawing. "The best thing by Corot that I ever saw," said Mr. Gifford one day, "was a lithograph after one of his pictures." On the other hand, every critic knows that Mr. Gifford does not elaborate unnecessarily, or so as to draw attention to the mechanism of the work, simply as mechanism. That were a fault almost as bad as the worst. Nor is Mr. Gifford disposed, like Turner, wantonly to sport with colour, to show it off merely as colour and nothing else. Finally, Mr. Gifford does not select his scene; his scene selects him.

LAFARGE'S DECORATIONS OF TRINITY CHURCH, BOSTON.

IF Trinity Church, Boston, is not the noblest of recently-erected church edifices in this country, as some of its admirers declare, it is certainly one of the most novel and conspicuous. Both the exterior and the interior are sumptuous in proportion, arrangement, and decoration. Talent of a high order has been employed in every art that has been summoned to complete this ostentatious edifice; and, if the general effect is peculiar (and there is room for criticism according to the varying standards of school and the wide divergence of critical tastes), at least it may be said that the designs have been executed with marked success.

The design of Trinity Church is pure French Romanesque. It is in the style of a Latin cross, with a semicircular apsis added in the rear, rounding off the chancel. From the centre rises a massive and lofty square tower, a peculiarity presented, it is said, by no other edifice in this country. This tower is carried by four piers, these resting on solid granite pyramids; while at each corner is a graceful turret. The roofs of the tower are covered with light-red tiles. It rises no less than 190 feet, the height from the floor to the top of the interior arches being 57 feet. The whole is built of rose-granite, and the trimmings are of Long Meadow freestone; while here and there large blocks of Westerly red granite have been inserted. In front are two towers, which have been richly decorated by the sculptor, and are surmounted by turrets and red-tile roofs.

Striking as is the exterior, when one enters the church through the massive doors, he is yet more impressed by the wealth of decoration and adornment, the novelty of the arrangement, and multitude of unwonted effects which Art has lavished there. The nave and chancel, extending from end to end 160 feet, is crossed by a transept measuring 122. The lofty tower, 46 feet square, is hollow, and gives majesty to the proportion of the edifice, and lends to it its main source of light. The spacious chancel, with its semicircular apsis, relieves the angularity of the lower walls; while the gentle light which is here and there admitted imparts soberness, but not gloom, both to the colouring of the decorations and to the general effect of the interior.

Mr. John Lafarge, to whom the interior decoration of Trinity Church was confided, has evidently spared no resource either in design or execution to render the work a striking testimony to his talents, and a bold and novel exhibition of the capabilities of his art. While every part of the edifice betrays the same marked characteristics, it is clear that Mr. Lafarge aimed to make the adornment of the interior of the tower the main feature of his work. It is the lofty, central point to which all eyes are directed at once on entering. Every detail of the upper part of the tower is enriched with colour and gilding and imaginative device. Within it is lavished the greatest effort of artistic fancy, and the interest is heightened by the distinct figures and groups which stand out conspicuously amid the wealth of indefinite decoration.

High up in the tower are twelve stained-glass windows, over